SEARCHLIGHT

R/V REGINA MARIS

— Ship to Shore News —

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On a quiet sunny Tuesday morning, we lifted the anchor off the white sandy bottom at Cat Island, and began to wind our way back across the shallow blue-green bank, in and out between the scattered coral heads. After a pleasant twenty-six hour passage north, around the top of Eluthera and down the Northeast Providence Channel, we arrived at Nassau. Food, fuel, and water were replenished, and crew and students laid in personal stores for the coming cold, wet, passage north to Newport, RI.

Nassau harbor bade us "good-bye and fair passage" as we set a course for the Northwest Providence Channel. As the temperature began to drop, shorts and T-shirts were covered with long pants, boots, and layers of shirts and sweaters. In the Florida Strait, we stepped into the Gulf Stream where a fresh northerly opposed the flow of the Stream, providing steep high seas, such as one would find in a gale but without the high winds and spray. Gear we thought we had stowed came slipping out with a crash, and a few cases of sea-sickness appeared. Speed checks showed only one knot headway, but the warm flow of tropical water added an additional three knots to our speed.

The next day the wind backed from north to west, allowing us to set all square sails. But by late afternoon, a falling barometer and dark clouds on the weather horizon confirmed the approach of yet another cold front. As the wind freshened, the sailor's rhyme came to mind--"Wind before rain, you soon make sail again," but a second look at the dark ragged edge of this front made one wonder. As the wind picked up, all square sails were furled except the square topsails, and all sails above the gaff and beyond the inner jib were also taken in. Then, with a sudden chill and a gust, the gale was upon us. REGINA heeled and ran before the wind. It took two people on the helm to hold her steady. A few hearty souls came up on deck in swim suits ready for a fresh water shower. As usual, the rain lasted only long enough for them to get soapy, requiring a rinse with buckets of warm Gulf Stream water. Then again a dark ragged cloud loomed to weather, and another squall passed us with fifty knots of wind. REGINA buried her lee rail in swirls of rushing foam. The upper topsail split from head to foot, and the main staysail blew the lead panel out. The wind in the rigging moaned, then roared, as wave tops were blown flat and the surface of the sea became smooth and smokey with driving spray. The square topsail, flogging and cracking in the wind, was clewed up to the yard and an order was shouted above the wind, "Volunteers to go aloft and secure the sail!" A number of crew and students, wide-eyed and grinning, sprang aloft, laid out on the yard and had the sail stowed in minutes. Quiet smiles and feelings of accomplishment showed on their faces as they returned to the deck. With two headsails and the lower topsail left set, we rode out the blow in relative comfort.

By the following afternoon, wind and sea had moderated enough to allow us to do Ocean Station Number 3 on Blake Plateau. We are collecting a series of plankton samples and water column measurements on our passage north, to build a data base with which to interpret our whale feeding studies. The samples were typically diverse, dozens of small shrimp-like creatures and a mass of transparent, gelantinous organisms. As we sieved one sample a transparent cylinder, six inches long with a firm sculptured surface, appeared. Each segment had an interior structure of tiny opaque lobes and a red spot. The organism was completely invisible in the sea water. As we gently transferred it to a sample jar, it glowed with an electric green light. We turned off the light and watched in wonder at its delicate tracery of phosphorescence. We identified it as a colonial salp, a transparent colony of beings sharing food and reproductive activities.

With our data collected, we squared away and resumed our course line parallel to and 150 miles off shore. There is a storm forecast for Cape Hatteras so we are keeping sea room and are in no hurry to round the Cape. But who needs to hurry ahead with such remarkable things to observe and study right here?

Respectfully submitted,

Evan Logan
ORV REGINA MARIS

First Time at Sea

An experience so different,
So unlike any before,
A boat so large,
in a port so far.

From Boston to foreign customs,
lost baggage and tears.
I walked to Puerto Plata's dock,
heavy with bags and fears.

At first she was terrifying,
so many lines rigged aloft,
Buntlines, clewlines, halyards and sheets.
I knew not their functions,
and marvelled their feats.

In charge of my watch
was mate Steve and hand Jake.
Day and night we would rotate,
helm, bow watch, and logs to take.

At first it was scary,
difficult, and hard to do.
Slowly it became routine,
like a child tying his shoe.

Now three weeks past,
Regina is my friend.
I know her charm,
and her deck I now tend.

She has taken me places,
Silver Bank, Hogsty Reef, and Cat Island.
On Regina I have studied
whales, conches, euphausiids and turtles.
On Regina I have seen
people, places, cultures and towns.

As a student I have learned much
of science, sailing, and life near the sea.
Sailing I now love--
so much to take with me.

by Estelle Harris
Student, Expedition 45S
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